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Rafael, Anna-Liisa

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Prayer in 2 Maccabees: Steering heavenly authorities

Anna-Liisa Rafael

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Second Maccabees recounts the history of the Maccabean Revolt, focusing particularly on its initial stages in Judea (170s and 160s BCE).[1] According to the book's introduction, the events reported in the work centre around the figure of Judas the Maccabee and his successful military campaigns, impressively supported by "heavenly appearances" (cf. 2 Macc 2:19–22). Throughout the historical narrative, God is characterized as the Almighty who takes action on earth and gains wide renown and glory through mighty works.[2] God's authority and propensity to intervene in earthly matters are axiomatic: it is part of the worldview transmitted throughout the work and constitutive of its vision of history. But how does God's (al)mightiness work? Who can steer heavenly authorities on earth?

This article suggests that, under specific conditions, prayer becomes a means by which one may actualize and channel God's (al)mightiness and induce its manifestations on earth. The emphases on God's omnipotence and God's deliverances, on the one hand, and the motif of prayer, on the other, are notable features in 2 Maccabees. The latter can be understood in tandem with the former, because prayers, as described in the book, often contain acknowledgements of and appeals to God's authority. My focus shall be on prayer and human agency, that is, the opportunities for humans to affect their

[1] A historical work written in Greek, 2 Maccabees aligns with the ideals of Hellenistic historiography. Since we know nothing about its author, it is mainly the content of the text and its connections with other roughly contemporaneous texts that have been used to determine its date and provenance. Based on these data, the work is usually dated sometime between the Maccabean Revolt, or the date mentioned in the first letter prefixed to the historical narrative (viz., 124 BCE; 2 Macc 1:9), and the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 BCE. Options in terms of its provenance include Diaspora settings (esp. Alexandria) and Judea, the latter of which is suggested by the significance in the role given in 2 Maccabees to the temple of Jerusalem. For discussions, see van Henten 1997, 50–57; Schwartz 2008, 3–15; Doran 2012, 18–19; Honigman 2014, 6–9. Yet, the process of the completion of 2 Maccabees may very well have been gradual and lasted until the Roman era, as suggested by Shepkaru 2006, 25–33; Zeitlin (1954, 21–22), too, highlights the uneven Greek style exhibited in the text. In this article, I treat the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees (3:1–15:37) as one literary entity, which it eventually became. Instead of speaking of an "author," I conceive of the first person voice maintained throughout the historical narrative as *the narrator* and refer to the narrator as *they* to respect their anonymity, including both gender and number. By this choice of wording, I wish to draw attention to the possibility that the text we have might indeed have been composed by more than one author/redactor; even so, it may be a coherent, collectively narrated literary entity. For ancient books as "multigenerational projects that enabled their own expansions and were not necessarily intended or received as original or complete," see Mroczek 2016, 13.

[2] The characterization of God as the Almighty or All-ruler (Παντοκράτωρ) is frequent in 2 Maccabees (e.g., 5:20; 6:26; 7:38; 8:11, 24, etc.), the demonstration of God's strength being one of the aims of the text; Schwartz 2008, 155.

own fate and the fate of others by communicating and co-operating with the heavenly authorities. To this end, I shall explore how and to what extent, according to 2 Maccabees, people may petition God and thereby heavenly powers to become amicable to their aims and aspirations.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the definition of magic in the context of 2 Maccabees, the structure and character of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees and the role of prayer in it. I maintain that an analysis of prayer and its effects in 2 Maccabees must grapple with the work's literary strategy and its vision of history, because only thereby can we learn how and what the book communicates with its audience in its ancient context. However scattered the historical narrative, whoever the protagonists and whatever their challenges, 2 Maccabees constantly focalizes prayer as the ideal and effective practice. Thereafter, I scrutinize some examples of prayers that prove effective in 2 Maccabees in order to sketch out the role and function of prayer more broadly. I pay particular attention to the conditions under which prayer can be effective and empower the individuals who pray, and suggest that effective prayer in 2 Maccabees testifies as much to the power of the subjects of prayer on earth as it does to the power of its addressee, the Almighty in the heavens. Moreover, while the book attests to the efficacy of prayer, it also suggests that this efficacy—that is, divine assistance with concrete historical consequences—could be contested on earth and may even be subverted by other means considered equally effective. In addition to effective co-operation with the heavenly authorities, which might result in sudden attacks on the enemy, the protagonists of the book also embrace more diplomatic modes of behavior practices, valorising the maintenance of good relations with neighbouring authorities, not just with the Almighty.

What is magic in 2 Maccabees?

Historical narrative texts—which abound in biblical and cognate literature—can be most illuminating for the study of magic, regardless of whether they explicitly address the question of magic. Such is the case, at least, of 2 Maccabees, which purports to describe "[t]he story of Judas the Maccabee and his brothers (…) and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism" (2 Macc 2:19–22). While 2 Maccabees nowhere explicitly discusses "magic", for instance, by

distinguishing "magic" from "(proper) religion,"[3] a notion of magic is implied. In order to make this argument and to begin my discussion of magic in 2 Maccabees, I shall elaborate on an incident concerning idolatry recounted in it. This story concerns Judas and his men, and some fallen soldiers and their "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia" (2 Macc 12:39–45) and is not among the most famous stories of 2 Maccabees. Yet, it functions as a useful introduction to our topic, because it allows for an examination of a failed ritual practice that ought to have provided protection to its performers. The rest of 2 Maccabees, as we shall see, rather exhibits an abundance of affirmative evidence for the efficacy of prayer so much so that it falls into confirmation bias, that is, it tends "to seek evidence that is consistent with one's [own] hypothesis and to avoid seeking falsificatory evidence."[4] It is mostly lacking negative exempla or even any such borderline cases, by which the scope and limits of prayer could have been complicated or examined more extensively.[5]

Apparently, Judas and his men were accustomed throughout the revolt to care for the bodies of their dead. Once, when they went to bring back the bodies of those fallen in battle, they discovered "under the tunic of each one of the dead (…) sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear." The book continues that, thus, "it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen" (2 Macc 12:39–40).[6] Several observations can be made concerning this incident. For one, the story suggests that the Jews fallen in battle succumbed as punishment for not having obeyed the

[3] Such distinctions are, of course, not to be taken as proofs of "magic" in any context, yet labelling the religious practices of others pejoratively as "magic" in contrast to one's own "religious" practices was not uncommon in antiquity. For magic as "a form of discourse that shaped stereotypes of magicians and witches as well as the actual practice of certain rituals in antiquity," as opposed to "a specific set of practices," see Stratton 2015.

[4] Following Czachesz's (2013, 170) characterization of confirmation bias; see also Czachesz p. ppp in this volume.

[5] In legal discussions, in contrast, one often finds a tendency to find the most obscure case to understand the extent of a given law. Luke 14:3–6, which depicts Jesus in conversation with lawyers and Pharisees, may reflect this type of discussion: Jesus's questions, "Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?" and "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?," demonstrate that Jesus is a competent discussant on Jewish legal matters, because he is aware of complex borderline cases in which several laws need to be applied jointly. 2 Maccabees does not attempt to test the limits of prayer but is content with giving examples of cases in which prayer to God is clearly effective (and prayer to idols clearly ineffective). The cluster of stories concerning Heliodorus (3:1–4:6) comes closest to speculations concerning the complexity of prayer and the interference of heavenly authorities in matters on earth; see esp. "Contesting prayer" below.

[6] The story further contains a description of the prayer by Judas and his men, in which they strongly renounce the grave sin of these fallen men (2 Macc 12:42), of a collection of money to be sent to Jerusalem "to provide for a sin offering" (12:43), and a short reflection on Judas's belief in the resurrection of these men (12:43–45). Katz (1960, 20–21) and Shepkaru (2006, 28–29) consider the reference to resurrection to be a later, possibly Christian, addition; Schwartz (2008, 30–34, 417), in contrast, considers this chapter to reflect "our author's main source (Jason of Cyrene)." In either case, these conclusions fall in line with the book's emphasis on prayer as effective; see "Prayers at the turning points" and, in particular, footnote 43 below.

law (ὁ νόμος).[7] In this case, moreover, the deaths had resulted from the "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia" (ἱερώματα τῶν ἀπὸ Ιαμνείας εἰδώλων) that they had carried on their person. Notably, it is not sacred tokens as such but sacred tokens *of the wrong kind* that are condemned here.[8] Finally, since the soldiers had carried the sacred tokens in secret (ὑπὸ τοὺς χιτῶνας), their transgression was not obvious until post-mortem investigation. This latter aspect is underlined when Judas and his men thank God for making visible (φανερὰ ποιοῦντος) hidden things and therefore deem God a righteous judge (12:41).

The picture given of this incident indicates a connection between artefacts (sacred tokens) and practices (carrying them as signalling trust in them), as well as a distinction between acceptable trust (in God) and unacceptable trust (in the idols/gods of Jamnia). Whereas the use of "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia" proved ineffective as protections from death in battle—if not effective, rather, as means of securing death—, the use of sacred tokens as such is not universally condemned. Yet, because this is the only instance in 2 Maccabees that discusses sacred tokens, it is not possible to determine from this text whether Jews would have been permitted to use sacred tokens of their own God and whether such an apotropaic practice would have been seen as effective. In other words, 2 Maccabees does not tell whether Judas and his men wore sacred tokens of the right kind under their tunics. Yet, as we shall see, the positive effects of putting one's trust in God are evidenced in practically all the incidents described in 2 Maccabees. Instead of carrying sacred tokens, prayer plays a role in most of these events, functioning as the primary practice by which Jews signal their trust in God.

Prayer, as I shall demonstrate below, is depicted in 2 Maccabees as a ritual that repeatedly produces some desired effect. The protagonists who pray believe in the actuality of repeated and direct interaction with supernatural, divine forces, and expect their prayer to result in the active participation

[7] For Schwartz (2008, 440), the prohibition of idolatry would have been obvious to Jews, meaning that this explanation would probably have been "meant for non-Jewish ears (however difficult it might be to imagine that even Gentiles would not know Jews were supposed to keep away from idolatry)." Doran (2014, 245), instead, notes that "some Jews were amenable to accepting that other gods had some power," even if they did not reject their God as the highest God. Nevertheless, the emphasis might not be on giving information about the law but, rather, on illuminating a "pattern of causality"—namely, "a measured balance between sin and retribution," a theme that surfaces in 2 Maccabees; see Honigman 2014, 205. On the so-called Deuteronomistic motif in 2 Maccabees, see the discussion below (esp. footnote 22).

[8] As Schwartz (2008, 440) notes, "idols" here stands for nothing other than the "gods of Jamnia," and only the use of the "differential and derogatory terminology" should distinguish them from the right God.

of those forces in their lives. In other words, prayer in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees can be understood as an available and repeatable means of interaction with supernatural, divine forces, by which those forces may be tasked with a specific request. According to Czachesz's heuristic definition of magic,[9] magic is more than just *ritualized behavior*; it is assumed to have *ritual efficacy*. Moreover, magic is often sustained on the same *cognitive mechanisms* that explain the efficacy of magic. Correspondingly, in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees, prayer may be depicted as ritualized behavior, but its manifested effects point to prayer's efficacy and sustain a system of beliefs in God's omnipotence, as well as in the powers of those who put their trust in God.[10]

According to 2 Maccabees, the effects of prayer are immanent in history and can thus be described in detail. Their descriptions point, however, to matters of knowing or believing, thus generating belief in the cause of such divine manifestations and the efficacy of prayer.[11] Interestingly, as we shall see, 2 Maccabees concedes that the effects of prayer are open to various interpretations, recognizing and even flirting with the falsifiability of their efficacy. This should not be taken to mean that belief either in the omnipotence of God or in the efficacy of prayer were in need of defence or proof; indeed, Sylvie Honigman disputes the very need for ancients "to demonstrate God's (or the gods') power in history," which would, for them, have amounted to "stating the obvious." Rather, questions that could be at stake concerned human agency—how, where and by whose command divine powers could be invoked.[12]

Prayer as the structuring principle of the history told in 2 Maccabees

A historian's task is to organize and depict events to present the past truthfully to their contemporaneous audience and future generations. At the same time, in order that the historian's work be readable, the events should form a narrative of some kind. Thus, no historical work can be based

[9] For this definition, see Czachesz (p. ppp) in this volume.
[10] The focus of my analysis is on how prayer is *narrated*. I am interested in the reciprocal relationship between the effects of prayer manifested in history and the patterns of thinking related to it, patterns that are reflected and valorised in the historical narrative concerning the Maccabean Revolt in 2 Maccabees. While these patterns of thinking may well be sustained by some cognitive mechanisms, this article primarily examines them as providing the historical narrative with a specific *social-theological logic*. For the social-theological logic of a text, see Clark 2004, 178–181.
[11] Cf. Czachesz 2011, 151–155.
[12] Honigman 2014, 34, 69; cf. Pascal Boyer's remark that "rituals can never fail, but people can fail to perform them correctly" quoted by Czachesz (p. ppp in this volume).

solely on the known facts and available documents, but each history is an interpretation informed by the knowledge and worldview of its composer; that is, historiographies often reflect the approaches to organizing the past that were considered persuasive at the time of composition. 2 Maccabees is no exception: it rearranges the past to make it fit into a narrative.[13] In so doing, it provides both explicit and implicit explanations as to how and why history has taken the course that it has, sustaining a system of beliefs that convey what its author(s) and audience(s) considered to be plausible.[14]

Acts of prayer and heavenly appearances are frequent in the history of the Maccabean Revolt according to 2 Maccabees, as many scholars have noted.[15] Yet, few have paid attention to the role of prayer as the structuring principle of the historical narrative. I maintain that 2 Maccabees may reflect the ritual behaviors characteristic of its time, as well as beliefs and expectations related to those behaviors in two ways: by explicitly discussing these matters and in the way in which it structures history. As for the latter, the prologue, which precedes the historical narrative of the Maccabean Revolt according to 2 Maccabees, is well informed, describing both the contents and the aspirations of the work (2 Macc 2:19–32).

The prologue begins with the following preview of the contents:

> The story of Judas the Maccabee and his brothers, and the purification of the great temple, and the dedication of the altar, and further the wars against Antiochos Epiphanes and his son Eupator, and the appearances that came from heaven to those who fought bravely for Judaism, so that though few in number they seized the whole land and pursued the barbarian hordes, and regained possession of the temple famous throughout the world, and liberated the city, and re-established the laws that were about to be abolished, while the Lord with great kindness

[13] For an overview of discussion on history as distinguished from the past, see Clark 2004, esp. 18–19.

[14] This is the case with Greek, as well as Judean, historiographical traditions, in which "works were written not simply to narrate events but to explain them: that is, to give them meaning"; Honigman 2014, 72. The theological-historical explanations of 2 Maccabees may strike the modern reader as odd, but the approach is comparable to any historical study that seeks to identify underlying causes behind historical events. In biblical historiography, one essential way to give meaning to events was through God, who created not only the universe but also time, maintains life on earth (e.g., Gen 1:3–4; Ps 104; 139:15–17) and may even order earthly events, interfere in the lives of individuals (e.g., Exod 3) or involve himself in clashes between ethnic groups (e.g., Deut 2:24–3:7; Jos 6:1–21). In contemporary times, the global market, social pressures or efforts to reify identity may be invoked in explanations of historical events. In either case, the explanation hinges on the assumption that certain underlying forces drive and explain historical events. Thus, as the work of history cannot be done without theory—that is, in an ideological vacuum wherein history is reported *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*—there is little sense in stressing that ancient historiographical works are "written not simply to narrate events" (cf. Honigman above). Likewise, labelling ancient historiographical works as "fictive" or "literary"—as opposed to historical—as Gruen (2002, 175–176) and Johnson (2004, 4–5) do with 2 Maccabees may misleadingly ascribe as fictive or literary precisely the elements in the narrative that its narrator considered to be historical.

[15] On the role of prayer in 2 Maccabees, especially from 8:1 on, see Lichtenberger 2008, 390–392; see also Schwartz 2008, 46–48: Simkovich 2011, 303–304; Tuval 2012, 210.

> became gracious to them—all this, which has been set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five volumes, we shall attempt to condense into a single book.[16]

Intriguingly, the prologue to the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees sets the work in close relation to another historical work that ought to cover the same events 2 Maccabees narrates; hence, the narrator has earnt the title "epitomist" (from ἐπιτεμεῖν; 2:23).[17] To some extent, the narrator even presents their work as an alternative history, giving a description of events that have already been recorded elsewhere in greater detail. In other words, the narrator does not feel the need to produce a comprehensive factual account of history, as an account satisfactory in that sense already exists; they aim rather to write their own abridgement of the history of the Maccabean Revolt that intentionally differs from yet does not replace the existing history of the period written by a certain Jason of Cyrene.[18]

Many scholars have sought to determine the theological or political aspirations behind the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees (if not of Jason of Cyrene).[19] According to Robert Doran's famous thesis, 2 Maccabees is a local history, centred on Judea and the city of Jerusalem with particular attention given to its temple and guardian deity. The historical narrative is modelled according to the ancient historiographical theme of a deity's commitment to a specific place and his/her repeated acts in defence of that place at the request of those who worship him/her at that place.[20] In the context of biblical and cognate literature, moreover, 2 Maccabees can be taken as an apologetic historiography, comparable to the works of Josephus or such historical New Testament writings as the Acts.[21] In addition, as the text touches upon themes such as transgression and loyalty, many studies on 2

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[16] 2 Macc 2:19–23; English translations are from NRSV sometimes slightly modified.

[17] Alternatively, scholars speak of the epitomator (e.g., Borchardt 2016) or abridger (e.g., Simkovich 2011); Schwartz (2008, 37) consistently uses author, "rather than the mere 'epitomator'," because he maintains that the author used other materials in addition to Jason's work and "his [sic] extensive work on the book well beyond mere epitomizing." See footnote 1 on the notion of the narrator preferred in this article.

[18] Although nothing survives of the source work, Jason of Cyrene's five-volume history, 2 Maccabees must still be read as an epitomized history. Moreover, there is no reason to presume that its narrator did not think of himself as a historian. For the epitome in ancient literature, see Horster & Reitz 2010.

[19] In her introduction to 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees, Honigman (2014, 9–11, 65–66) notes that understanding 2 Maccabees as "theological history" enabled more serious scholarly inquiries into it, as former scholarship rather just took it as bad historiography and appreciated 1 Maccabees as the more reliable source of the historical period in question. Her own study, among other recent works such as Williams 2003, argues for a more balanced approach, in which both 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees are understood as works of history and significant sources concerning the Maccabean Revolt.

[20] Doran 1981, 97–109; 114; cf. 2012, 6–7, 89–90.

[21] Van Henten 1997, 20 n. 7; Lichtenstein 2008, 385–387; van Henten (1997, 212) also characterizes 2 Maccabees as "a liberation history of the Jewish temple-state."

Maccabees have identified a sequence of (human) sin, (divine) punishment and reconciliation between God and God's people in the general narrative. Briefly, this reflects the text's "Deuteronomistic" approach to history—that is, a recognizable biblical narrative pattern behind the historical grand narrative.[22]

However, the composition is not necessarily receptive to attempts to discern such trajectories from the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees.[23] The second half of the prologue sheds further light onto the nature and purpose of the epitome:

> For considering the flood of statistics involved and the difficulty there is for those who wish to enter upon the narratives of history because of the mass of material, we have aimed to please those who wish to read, to make it easy for those who are inclined to memorize, and to profit all readers. For us who have undertaken the toil of abbreviating, it is no light matter but calls for sweat and loss of sleep, just as it is not easy for one who prepares a banquet and seeks the benefit of others. Nevertheless, to secure the gratitude of many we will gladly endure the uncomfortable toil, leaving the responsibility for exact details to the compiler, while devoting our effort to arriving at the outlines of the condensation. For as the master builder of a new house must be concerned with the whole construction, while the one who undertakes its painting and decoration has to consider only what is suitable for its adornment, such in my judgment is the case with us. It is the duty of the original historian to occupy the ground, to discuss matters from every side, and to take trouble with details, but the one who recasts the narrative should be allowed to strive for brevity of expression and to forego exhaustive treatment. At this point therefore let us begin our narrative, without adding any more to what has already been said; for it would be foolish to lengthen the preface while cutting short the history itself.[24]

The mentioned acts of reading (ἀναγινώσκειν) and memorizing are connected (2:25): reading entails the development of competent, in-depth knowledge of the material, implying that one can later return to such material repeatedly, that is, to remember it. In the case of 2 Maccabees, the easiness of such

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[22] See, e.g., Doran 1981, 110; Nicklesburg 1981, 118–119; van Henten 1997, 140ff; Lichtenberger 2008, 389; Schwartz 2008, 21–22. In most cases, this view is constructed from a series of observations scattered throughout the historical narrative suggesting that history comprises God's education of God's people through crises and trials, which in turn ensure that they stay faithful to God and consent to God's will, covenant or law(s) (see esp. 2 Macc 6:12–17, as well as e.g. 4:31–17; 5:17–20; 7:33; 10:4). Honigman (2014, 10–11, 33–35, 72–76) criticizes the characterization of 2 Maccabees as theological or "religious history" and points out that the so-called "Deuteronomistic" approach to history—which she prefers to call the sin–retribution pattern—is hardly exceptional in ancient Near East historiographies and even common in Greek and Roman ones.

[23] Even though most scholars (at least, since Doran 1981) divide the historical narrative into smaller narrative cycles that are thematically compatible and mutually comparable, they notwithstanding usually envision an overarching grand narrative; for an overview of different ways to understand the structure of the narrative, see Williams 2003, 76–78. See also Doran 2012, 11–13; Honigman 2014, 77–84.

[24] 2 Macc 2:24–32.

reading acts is enhanced by the narrator's preference for "the things suitable for the exposition (τὰ ἐπιτήδεια πρὸς διακόσμησιν)" rather than for "the overall structure (τῆς ὅλης καταβολῆς; 2:29)" of the historical narrative. Attempting to "please those who read," the narrator may have thought, in particular, of those who read the work aloud and not necessarily in its entirety but in excerpts—for instance, to train their memory (cf. 2 Macc 2:25).[25]

A reader of 2 Maccabees soon gets an idea of what easiness of this kind entails: the historical narrative that follows adheres to a narrative structure comprising relatively independent and short episodes. The narrator does not supply transitions that would otherwise bridge the isolated stories into a coherent narrative, often at the expense of the clarity of the chronology of events. This so-called episodic style of 2 Maccabees is one of its distinct features. Nevertheless, instead of being taken as a significant aspect of the composition, it has often been dismissed as a technical feature or even as a regrettable sign of the author's inability to compose a coherent abridgement of historical events. Along with enthusiasm for miraculous stories, which typically mark the climax of a single episode, the episodic nature of 2 Maccabees has been lamented as a feature that prevents the scholar from being able to consider the text a (serious) account of history.[26]

The episodic characteristic of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees should not be passed over especially since the narrator underlines it and gives it a purpose in the prologue. Indeed, the narrator justifies their alternative or complementary version of the history by claiming it as useful for readers

[25] I take reading in this context to entail a social activity comprising memorization and interaction between reader and listeners; Simkovich's (2011, 303–305) observations concerning the influence of Greek drama on 2 Maccabees may support my interpretation. I do not mean, moreover, that 2 Maccabees could not have been read silently from the beginning until the end; I suggest that it was primarily purposed to function in contexts in which it may have been read out loud and in smaller portions and, possibly, memorized. Augustine's supposed amazement (*Confessions* 6.3) that Ambrose read silently—"when he read, his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent [*sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant*]"—is often taken to indicate the rarity of the practice of silent reading in the ancient world in contrast to the present commonality of the practice. Although the picture is more complex, the "particularly public characteristic of ancient reading" is still maintained, as "the association of reading in antiquity with personal display is further emphasized not only by the fact that it often occurred aloud, but also because is frequently took place before audiences of friends, patrons or students in public"; see Platts 2009, esp. pp. 70–71. For the passage in Augustine and a critical discussion on the "two ways of reading," see Carruthers 2008, 212–216.

[26] The miracles described in 2 Maccabees have sometimes been taken as useless for historical analysis based on the assumption that they cannot be descriptive of actual history, even being described therefore as detrimental to the credibility of the work. See, e.g., Harrington 1999, 138–139, 149–150; Schwartz 2008, 51–53. Oftentimes, such evaluations of 2 Maccabees invite a comparison of the text with 1 Maccabees, which, in turn, has been considered to represent more "traditional" historiographical approach; see, e.g., Grintz 2007, 318. Williams rightly defends 2 Maccabees as a credible historiography when evaluated in its own context; Williams 2003, 71; 2001, 180–181; see also Doran 2012, 3. Honigman's critical overview of the history of scholarship of 2 Maccabees supports Williams's view; see footnote 19 above.

not interested in the "bulk of the material" that constituted the voluminous original work, but for readers "who wish to enter upon the narratives of history" (τοῖς τῆς ἱστορίας διηγήμασιν; 2:24). The narrator therefore devotes their energy to developing "the edifying patterns of the epitome" (τοῖς ὑπογραμμοῖς τῆς ἐπιτομῆς; 2:28). Consequently, if 2 Maccabees was written for such purposes, we might consider the smaller, legible and memorisable units to be particularly worthy of attention. While the historical narrative, then, is less specific with respect to some details or chronology, it purports to indicate how history works and is useful for its readers, and how truths are conveyed in history in a way that is clearer than was depicted in Jason's work.[27]

Jonathan A. Goldstein remarks that, while 1 Maccabees recounts "only a selection" of Judas and his men's prayers (four), there are twelve descriptions of them praying in 2 Maccabees. He remarks on this state of affairs that "[o]ne might have thought the abridger would be glad to omit such passages, but he preserves them at almost every opportunity" and concludes that the "unabridged work probably had still more."[28] Indeed, it might seem contradictory that 2 Maccabees preserves scenes of prayer "at almost every opportunity" and in a rather repetitive manner, while at the same time claiming to be an epitome. In light of the prologue, however, it makes sense to assume that the praying protagonists replicate exactly the kind of edifying pattern laboriously designed for the epitome.[29]

The repetitive structure and episodic nature of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees lend to the text's ability to glean lessons hidden in historical events, lessons that are useful for the readers not because they are particular to those events but because they reflect more general behaviors and more general truths.[30] When the literary strategy of the epitome, outlined in the prologue, is recognized as

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[27] Borchardt (2016, 80) discusses 2 Maccabees, mostly focusing on the prologue and its second part, as an auxiliatory text, that is, a text that is written to "aid the reception of flawed, but otherwise valuable texts." Although we cannot know anything sure about Jason of Cyrene's work, I, too, am inclined to think that 2 Maccabees was written to aid the reception, if not of Jason of Cyrene's work, of the valuable contents of the history of the Maccabean Revolt.

[28] Goldstein 1983, 6.

[29] The importance of examples (Gr.παράδειγμα; Lat. *exemplum*) in ancient literature can hardly be overstated. By the Roman era, the prevailing sense of history was that the fundamental purpose of history was that it should be exemplary; see Scanlon 1994, 32–33. For the similar notions in 4 Maccabees as a historiography meant for argumentation and emulation, see Tolonen & Uusimäki 2017, 123–126; for the paradigm of noble death in ancient literature, see van Henten 1997, 210–243. Scanlon (1994, 29) notes, moreover, that historical didactic exemplary stories often create a credibility gap for modern readers.

[30] Doran (1981, 97) compares 2 Maccabees to Polybius's historiography, where history serves political and moral purposes, instructing its readers on how to behave rightly. See also Doran 2012, 89. Johnson (2004, 6) similarly emphasizes that the literary intentions of "historical fiction" should not be passed over lightly; although they aim to entertain their readers, the stylistic features may also serve authorial purposes and contain didactic strategies. Although I object to Johnson's classification of 2 Maccabees as "historical fiction," I agree with her observation that the values of

constitutive of the historical narrative itself, the role of prayer becomes apparent, not only as a particular narrative embellishment favored by the narrator (or Jason of Cyrene): it is claimed by this history as an effective resource on earth. This strategy draws attention to the narrative patterns of the historical narrative, making them central to the "sense of history" developed in 2 Maccabees.[31]

Prayers at the turning points

Giving a second look to the first half of the prologue, the preview of the contents of the book (2 Macc 2:19–22), we may see that it also aligns with the repetitive structure and episodic nature of the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees. The protagonists mentioned by name are Judas the Maccabee and his brothers (2:19). Yet, the protagonists also comprise those who "fought bravely for Judaism" and were aided by "appearances that came from heaven" (2:21). The latter qualification specifies the deeds of Judas and his men but is, at the same time, more inclusive. As we shall see, it also better accounts for all the heroic protagonists of the book who are not limited to Judas and his company but, indeed, to all those whom the narrator displays as fighting bravely for Judaism and whom they trust having been aided by heavenly appearances. Most of the stories related in 2 Maccabees follow the same principal storyline, in which weak prospects for (military) success inevitably lead to a miraculous, victorious outcome by the help of God or some related intermediary figure (cf. 2 Macc 2:21). While the diverse episodes function as exciting adventures on their own, they betray a more general ideological function together. The historical narrative, as suggested by the prologue, is structured around the successful process—or, perhaps better still, processes—of remedying the wrong state of affairs: recovering what had almost been lost, re-establishing what had almost been abolished, purifying of what had been defiled, reconquesting and conquesting, and so forth. In addition to one grand narrative of purification or liberation, or even in replacement of it, the historical narrative

entertainment and education need not be mutually exclusive. In contrast, cognitive studies suggest that emotionally engaging and entertaining approaches may contribute to the processes of memorization and learning; cf. Gervais et al. 2011, 393–395.

[31] As Rajak (2001 [1986], 19–20) writes, "a sense of history is, after all, no more than an interest in the past, seen as some sort of continuity, within a context (even if a false one) of time. Furthermore, whatever uses this past be put to—understanding the ways of God, describing one's own identity or relating to others, interpreting current events or predicting future ones, defending one's nation or justifying one's party, producing social cohesion, controlling the younger generation or understanding the older one (and there may be many more)—it is a prerequisite for something of an attitude of enquiry and curiosity to be present among creators and consumers. For one thing, without such a shared attitude, the past simply could not be a potent force." For the "sense of history" in Josephus, its historical contextualization and comparison to contemporary works, see Rajak 2001 [1986], 13–18.

comprises several small episodes in which a wrong is repeatedly righted and God made favorable to his people. Prayer, as we shall see, plays a prominent role in practically each of the small narrative units that constitute the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees.

Regardless of the mention of Judas the Maccabee as the main character of the history told in 2 Maccabees (2:19), the historical narrative does not begin with Judas and his brothers but rather with a series of episodes surrounding the temple and its pious defender, the high priest Onias (3:1–4:6). This section of the book also contains the first inquiry into the appearances that came from heaven (cf. 2:21), giving an account of God's miraculous and decisive intervention as invoked by the intensive act of prayer. Judas and his brothers are entirely absent from the beginning of the historical narrative, and the stories concerning high priest Onias could be read independently. Thus, these stories do not serve as to provide immediate background to the actual revolt unless they are taken to illuminate how the world functions—i.e., how human beings and other both visible and invisible powers (co)operate in it.[32]

The events concerning high priest Onias are instigated by a quarrel between him and "a certain Simon" concerning the treasures of the temple in Jerusalem (3:1–12). As their disagreement intensifies, King Seleucus, the ruler of Asia Minor as well as Judea, learns about this dispute and, consequently, about the treasures of the temple. The king sends a man named Heliodorus to Jerusalem to retrieve these treasures (3:7). An imminent threat thus casts its shadow over the temple, sowing distress among the inhabitants of the city (3:14). Consequently, the priests throw themselves to the ground, raise up their eyes and beseech God to do take care of what belongs to him (3:15). Men rush out of their homes, joining the priests in prayer (3:18). Women keep to their homes but participate by lifting their hands and crying out to God (3:19–20).

The intense prayers of the Jerusalemites do not stop Heliodorus, but they bring about a turning point: once Heliodorus reaches the treasury of the temple, he is stopped by a manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια) caused by "the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority" (3:24). There first appears a frightening rider with a magnificently caparisoned horse who rushes at Heliodorus and attacks him (3:25). Thereafter, two young men surround Heliodorus, flogging him continuously with a whip (3:26). Thus, the

[32] According to Johnson (2004, 14), Onias's figure foreshadows that of Judas. Moreover, "Onias's reappearance together with the prophet Jeremiah to bless Judah's army before the climactic battle at 2 Macc 15:12–16 leaves no room to doubt the importance of his symbolic role"; Johnson 2004, 40. See also Schwartz 2008, 184–185; Doran 2012, 89–90.

impudent invader of the treasury was disarmed, defeated and "deprived of any hope of recovery." He and his company thereby "recognized clearly the sovereign power of God" (3:27–29). Meanwhile, the people of the city rushed into the temple with joy, "praising the Lord who had acted marvellously for his own place" (3:30).

The story of high priest Onias and the attempt to plunder the temple is passionate, visual, and awe-inspiring (3:21, 24, 28). Priests and laypeople, men and women, old and young alike pray to their Lord Almighty (3:15–21).[33] Although the manifestations of divine intervening powers are in the form of men and horses, the people recognize heavenly authority in these miraculous appearances.[34] Following the miracle, the people of the city are convinced that God had indeed come to their rescue (3:24, 30). Thus, the shared experience of threat, on the one hand, and of rescue, on the other, frame the story. Such a narrative framework is one characteristic feature of the effective prayer scenes in 2 Maccabees.

A similar act of prayer preludes the uprising led by Judas Maccabeus more immediately. It is preceded by various descriptions of turmoil in the region stirred by internal conflicts among the Jews (4:7–5:26) and persecution in the cities of Judea (6:1–7:42).[35] While these events took place, Judas wandered around the villages, secretly rallying his troops together, men who "had continued in the Jewish faith" (8:1). Together,

> [t]hey implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all; and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the godless; to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be levelled to the ground; to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name; and to show his hatred of evil.[36]

This prayer by Judas and his men is likewise laden with emotion, lamenting the recent history of the region and its people. It also summarizes and thereby reminds of the threats, which have been

[33] Doran 2012, 83–85.
[34] As Doran (2012, 85–87) points out, the description contains several motives typical of ancient epiphanies, pointing to the divine nature of the event.
[35] In between these two sets of narratives, 2 Macc 5:27 briefly mentions Judas Maccabeus, recounting his withdrawal into the wilderness. Thus, the historical narrative keeps Judas pure from defilement and the internal conflicts between the Jews. On the place of the persecution stories in 2 Maccabees, see the discussion below.
[36] 2 Macc 8:2–4.

recounted earlier. What is more, the prayer seems to be effective and bring about a turning point in the history of the Maccabean Revolt:

> As soon as the Maccabee got his army organized, the enemies could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy.[37]

In contrast to the manifestations that halted Heliodorus, the events that follow the prayer of Judas and his men do not feature otherworldly figures; Judas and his men attack the powerful enemy with military success that one could characterize as miraculous. Yet these two cases share two important features: an indication of divine protection underlying successful resistance and communal prayer preceding that protection. The people of Jerusalem sought God's aid in the face of danger, and the enemy, whatever advantages they might have enjoyed, was vanquished by divine powers. The sequence of events suggests, as the people of the city themselves conclude, that God had accepted the request of their prayer. Likewise, in the case of Judas's prayer, the sequence of events—the despair before prayer and the success following it—suggests that God had heeded the prayer, thus turning his wrath into mercy.[38]

Prayer in both cases becomes an effective means of invocation: it points to God as the divine agent and recipient of the prayer, which demands his presence and active participation. Such prayer is more than just an expression of wistfulness; the sequence of events suggests that prayer serves as a direct appeal to God, that it can arouse God's sympathy and sense of justice, and that the course of history may be altered because of it. Because this work purports to bear witness to the effectiveness of prayer in history, it seeks to strengthen its audience's trust in the material reality of God's compassion and just judgement on earth. It is, however, the sequence of the events—the narrative that reports of prayer first and success thereafter—that is the primary means by which this trust is strengthened. In other words, the narrator provides no explication of the relationship between cause and effect, apart from his systematic organization of events that repeatedly suggests a direct connection between sincere communal prayer in times of distress and success, whether by the help of divine appearances or by military power. The motif of epiphany may also be twofold in 2 Maccabees: while there are

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[37] 2 Macc 8:5.

[38] Most scholars consider the changing of God's wrath to mercy the turning point of the whole historical narrative. For different ways to understand the structure of the historical narrative, see Williams 2003, 76–78; Doran 2012, 11–13. See also Nickelsburg 1981, 118–119; Schwartz 2008, 48. I, instead, understand the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees as consisting of turning points that happen all the time; cf. the discussion on "edifying patterns" above.

descriptions of concrete miraculous epiphanies, there is also an implied idea of God making visible through the course of history whom God favors.[39]

The historical narrative begins with stories about high priest Onias and concludes with stories about the successful battles of Judas and his men. A lengthy section intervenes between these two story clusters, portraying the distress that Judea fell into, including both the internal conflicts among the Jews (4:7–5:26) and the persecutions they faced from foreign rulers (6:1–7:42). The latter section, which includes the stories of the so-called "Maccabean martyrs"—the old scribe Eleazar (6:18–31), the seven brothers and their mother (7:1–41)—is perhaps the most famous segment of 2 Maccabees.[40] Although these persecution stories are removed from the main themes of the work, the fate of the temple and military resistance, the cluster fits into the composition as another example of (effective) prayer.[41] The final story in this cluster, which tells about the seven brothers and their mother, is particularly concerned with anticipatory prayer: one after another, the brothers voice their hope for God's compassion (cf. 7:5–6; 7:32–33), their bodily resurrection (7:9, 11, 14, 36) and the deliverance of their people (7:16, 37). Moreover, the last of the brothers addresses God as if appealing to God to intervene (7:37–38).[42]

Peculiarly in the context of 2 Maccabees, the so-called martyrs die without being able to witness the effects of their prayer. These stories provide the exception that proves the rule: appeal to God is the preferred code of conduct, even if God does not respond with immediate intervention.[43] Moreover,

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[39] Cf. Judas and his men thanking God for making visible hidden things in 12:41 and the discussion above.

[40] Schwartz 2008, 298; Honigman 2014, 229.

[41] The famous persecution stories introduce to 2 Maccabees themes not otherwise prominent in the work, such as the noble death, martyrdom and bodily resurrection, which is why they (esp. 2 Macc 6:18–7:41/42) have sometimes been considered later additions to the book; see Bowersock 1995, 10–2; Shepkaru 2006, 25–33; against Bowersock, see e.g. Schwartz 2008, 20 n. 51. Yet, even if they were later additions, the excursion might nonetheless elaborate the pattern that connects most of the stories told in the book, the pattern that emphasizes the distress of pious Jews, their prayer to God and the perseverance of their faith in God's help. Thus, I agree that there are ways in which these stories do not fit the historical narrative but also ways in which they do: while they depart from the pattern of miraculous rescue stories, they nevertheless rearticulate the narrative pattern of prayer, trust in God and—albeit with a short delay—in God's eventual deliverance. I develop this argument in my forthcoming dissertation, part of which discusses the reception of the story of the mother and her seven sons in 2 Maccabees.

[42] Technically, only the prayer of the last boy takes the form of a prayer that is comparable with the form most frequently applied in 2 Maccabees (cf. ἐπικαλούμενος τὸν θεὸν; 7:37); see footnote 47 below. Yet, there is no reason to assume he did not pray on behalf of all his brothers.

[43] Rather, their individual rewards are delivered posthumously. The same is likewise true of the story of Razis (14:37–46): he dies in the most brutal manner, without either a miraculous intervention or being afforded to opportunity to see the victory of his people; he, too, dies after invoking God's aid, expecting to be rewarded after death. Finally, Judas and his men's prayer for the fallen soldiers in Jamnia is not proven successful, but the fact that they pray and make an offering for

the sequence of events may again help the audience grasp the true lesson, the miraculous effects of prayer: Judas and his men's prayer and the beginning of the successful revolt directly follow these stories. It is thus possible to understand, as most scholars do, that God's anger was eased and turned into mercy (8:5) not only by the prayer of Judas and his men and their loyalty to Judaism (cf. 8:2–4), but also by the prayers and the self-sacrifices of the persecuted and publicly slaughtered Jews (esp. 7:37–38).[44] While this connection, too, is not explicitly established, such an interpretation may be supported by the emphasis on effective prayer and God's deliverance in the rest of the book.[45]

The praying protagonists of 2 Maccabees are more diverse a group than Judas and his men. There are Jews who wear amulets (regrettably, of the wrong kind), a high priest with powerful non-military (though not non-violent) resistance, and ordinary Jews who suffer, in addition to the acclaimed protagonists of the book, Judas and his men, to whom prayer before battle is a norm. Instead of a grand narrative or an "overall structure" (2:29), I suggest that the feature, which ties these individual and unconnected stories and their diverse heroic protagonists together is their acts of prayer. Most of these stories operate with a logic that highlights the effectiveness of prayer, even though the connection between prayer and the success is never made quite explicit. Adding to the negative example of the "sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia,"[46] the section concerning persecutions shows that even Jews who kept the laws could die, thus indicating that prayer is not always answered with immediate effect on earth. These stories slightly complicate the otherwise rather straightforward pattern promoted in the book. It should be noted, however, that these "martyrs" do not even ask God to prevent their deaths—instead, they ask to be resurrected, which translates as their final deliverance, and for their people's deliverance. The effects of their prayer may thus be seen to materialize outside the scope of the book (in the afterlife), as well as in the successful uprising of Judas and his men.

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the sins of the dead and the narrator compliments Judas's foresightedness may suggest that their prayer was not entirely in vain.

[44] Most scholars assume that the death of the martyrs and the prayer of the fighters are jointly effective, though the martyrs are usually given emphasis; Doran 1981, 54, 56–57; 2012, 181; van Henten 1997, 154–156. See also Nickelsburg 1981, 199; Himmelfarb 1998, 31–32; Harrington 1999, 138, 145; Schwartz 2008, 47–48, 50. According to Shepkaru (2006, 25–26), however, the tipping point is the prayer of the fighters (8:2–4): see also McClellan 2009, 86.

[45] Czachesz (p. ppp in this volume) discusses biased interpretation of evidence, noting that "information that may be seen as confirming one's hypothesis (or prejudice) is sought for and interpreted as such, whereas information falsifying it is avoided and ignored." Hence, if the audience(s) of 2 Maccabees were already conditioned to regard prayer as effective, they would be inclined to interpret the martyrs' prayer as having directly effected the success of Judas and his men.

[46] See the discussion above.

When is prayer effective?

In 2 Maccabees, prayers made before battle function as appeals to God and his powers and requests for heavenly assistance.[47] They may be made jointly with different gestures that express sincerity or a repentant attitude—for example, throwing oneself upon the ground (10:4, 25) and sprinkling dust onto one's head (10:25; 14:15) or praising God and cheering on fellow fighters (8:23; 12:37; 13:15; 15:8–9).[48] Prayer strengthens the courage of those who pray, even preparing the fighters for death.[49] Such dimensions and descriptions of prayer add to the emotional appeal of the narrative and enable the audience of 2 Maccabees to imagine prayer as an act of utmost importance.[50]

Visions and heavenly appearances follow the protagonists of 2 Maccabees and, especially, Judas and his men.[51] Some of these appearances are miraculous heavenly type, comparable to those that Heliodorus faced. Moreover, they, too, have historically significant consequences (see, e.g., 10:29–31; 11:6–11; 12:22). Yet Judas and his men may also achieve great victories without impressive interventions of visible heavenly forces. Even then, however, they take these victories as due in no less of a part to divine assistance (see, e.g., 8:24–25; 12:16).[52] Thus, although the protagonists can

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[47] Most frequently, prayer is expressed with the verbs ἀξιόω (e.g. 5:4; 8:14, 29; 10:4, 16; 12:42; and καταξιόω in 31:12; note also that Heliodorus's friends "begged" [ἠξίουν] Onias at 3:31 and the mother "begs" [ἀξιῶ] her last son at 7:28) and ἐπικαλέω (e.g. 3:15, 22, 31; 8:2; 12:15, 28, 36; 13:10; 15:21, 22). Both verbs imply a connection between prayer and request, appeal or demand. In addition, they contain an aspect of reverence for the addressee, acknowledging his/her authority. The word λιτανεία, which suggests a pious petition, also appears in 2 Maccabees (3:20; 10:16; cf. λιτανεύω, 14:15), and the word is also used in the Septuagint and in 3 Maccabees (2:21; 5:9) in much the same context. Likewise, ἱκετεία and ἱκετεύω (cf. e.g. 11:6; 12:42) constitute appeals to a higher authority for change.

[48] Simkovich (2011, 303) gives an exhaustive list of prayers and related gesticulations in 2 Maccabees: "1:23–29; 2:9; 2:10; 2:10; 3:15 prostrated; 3:18–20 held up hands, prostrated; 8:27; 8:29; 10:4 prostrated; 10:16; 10:25–27 rising from prayer; 10:38 thanksgiving and hymns; 11:6 lamentations and tears; 12:6; 12:15; 12:28; 12:36; 12:42; 13:12 lying prostrate for three days; 14:15 sprinkled dust on their heads; 14:34–36 stretched out their hands; 15:12 stretched out their hands; 15:21–24 stretched out hands; 15:26; 15:34 looking to heaven."

[49] Judas explicitly encourages his men to fight until their deaths (8:21; 15:10–11, 17). According to Tessa Rajak (2001 [1986], 17–18), the sense of history developed in Josephus's historical works also joins the history of Jews to law and such courage, suggesting that readiness to die for the laws is its underlying theme throughout. Also, the stories of Eleazar (6:18–31) and the mother and her seven sons (7:1–41) definitely reflect such courage, although the protagonists do not explicitly pray for it.

[50] Simkovich (2011, 303–305) makes an interesting case of the prayer in 2 Maccabees, suggesting that it reflect the influence of Greek drama, rather than the biblical heritage. Prayer linked with a movement (see footnote 48 above) should mark "moments of great passion," as the actors in Greek plays wore masks and thus expressed their feelings with bodily expressions.

[51] Divine manifestations (ἐπιφάνεια) are one of the most frequent tropes of 2 Maccabees, used in most of its stories; Schwartz 2008, 172; Doran 1981, 98–104.

[52] In classical Greek literature, ἐπιφάνεια does not necessarily mean divine appearances. In military histories, it could also mean the front line of battle or the unexpected arrival of the enemy from out sight. In the Hellenistic era, ἐπιφάνεια would

explicitly request in prayer for an appearance from heaven (e.g., 12:36–37), God's favourable response and participation does not necessarily come in the shape of actual appearances. In other words, co-operation with heavenly powers may take the shape of otherworldly figures or manifest in more abstract terms, such as righteous power, guidance, or courage. Therefore, although a heavenly appearance may be a more explicit affirmation that prayer was effective and that God is present and fighting alongside Judas and his men, prayer and success alone suffice to indicate divine acceptance and aid. Regardless of the level of extravagance of the appearances, moreover, prayer precedes God's participation and is thus the central act that runs throughout the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees.

Fighters who entrust their fate to God in prayer before battle are every time successful and understand that God provides their military success. Their effective prayer is most often a shared collective enterprise in 2 Maccabees. The emphasis on communal prayer—whether by military men, priests, women or children—promotes the image of an ideal community and a normative way of life: the effectiveness of prayer is evidence of like-minded individuals who uphold Jewish laws and customs.[53] The power of prayer is not tested to the extent that 2 Maccabees would contain one description of a battle where the protagonists would not pray and thus lose for that very reason. Yet, the excess of positive evidence suggests that 2 Maccabees condemns dissidence among adherents of the Jewish faith. Only the prayer of law-abiding, noble and fearless Jews can have an impact on God, at least to the extent that it might mollify God's anger.[54]

There seems to be certain additional conditions under which God can effectively be asked to involve himself in human affairs. The prayers of 2 Maccabees often repeat an appeal to a certain obligation of God (cf. e.g. 8:15, 21, 36; 10:25–28, 26). It is, at least, advantageous for the pious and law-obedient praying figures if they can appeal to the law(s) or historical examples of similar circumstances in

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more often indicate divine assistance but, even then, such assistance could be interpreted as the victorious result of a battle, not necessarily from visible appearances. See Lührmann 1971, 187, 189–190. Likewise, in 2 Maccabees, divine manifestations can be understood as both unexpected and impressive visual appearances and more ordinary events and actions that betray God's favour; in addition to ἐπιφάνεια, the historical narrative often describes events with cognate verbal expressions (esp. the passive of ἐπιφαίνω). See, e.g., Schwartz (2008, 431) on 2 Macc 12:22.

[53] Accuracy in the observance of the Sabbath, even amidst fighting, highlights the importance of law-observance (see e.g. 8:1, 25–26).

[54] 2 Maccabees not only draws a line between Jews and non-Jews but between the pious and the impious; see, e.g., van Henten 1997, 210. As the case of the idols of Jamnia suggests, Jews could die in battle if they were unfaithful (see the discussion above). Another illuminating case is the story of king Antiochos's death (in 9:1–28), for apparently Antiochos's prayers to God are sincerely meant but simply come too late for him to be excused (see esp. v. 13); for a limited time, he even considers becoming a Jew, but as this promise does not do any good to him, he gives up "all hope for himself" (9:18).

which God has previously intervened. The protagonists of 2 Maccabees thus place themselves in a historical continuum, demanding for themselves through prayer the same treatment afforded to their ancestors before them (8:19–20; 12:13–16). The narrative thereby also affirms the continuum of pious Jews from the patriarchs to Judas the Maccabee and his men.[55] In these cases, one might reasonably ask, whether God would have a true chance to decline such prayers—whether divine appearances or invisible powers are commanded by God, or God is indeed obliged to provide them.

To a certain extent, suspense is also a common feature of individual episodes in the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees. Heavenly powers can be invoked by the regular procedure, but the implied lesson is that they should not be taken for granted. The protagonists recognize this by repeatedly petitioning God in a fear sincerely felt, showing humbleness and submission to God. If, then, God ultimately decides what happens on earth and whether or not heavenly powers should descend to defend God's people on earth, the concusion that the historical narrative emphasizes God's almightiness seems accurate.[56] This is, however, only one side of the story. Some examples also hint at God's subordination: the Almighty seems to be bound to act according to the wishes of the praying protagonists so long as they remain law-obedient and righteous. The addressee of the prayers is not a personified, reflective decision-maker, nor is there in any case actual verbal exchange between the protagonists and God: God is known rather through heavenly powers, appearances, previously established sacred laws or prior historical events, and, if God acts on earth, such actions are instrumental to human purposes. Thus, while the protagonists cannot command God, the Almighty seems to act according to and never in contradiction with some causal rules, previous engagements, or principles of consistency or universality, any of which makes it possible for human beings to have God's powers at their behest.

Prayer is a ritual that not only enables interaction with the divine but also co-operation with heavenly powers. This co-operation is aimed at securing time and again the favor of God, most often demonstrated by military success, thus affecting the course of history. Repeated acts of prayer signal the established trust of the protagonists in God and God's aid. It is this trust that is constantly subject to tests and thus constitutes the suspense of the narrative: in their prayers, the protagonists of the

[55] Gruen 1998, 7–8. Toward the end of the historical narrative, Judas and his men likewise refer back to their own previous battles, demanding God's action for similar reasons (15:22–24).
[56] The themes most often acknowledged in the historical narrative are God's majesty and almightiness, as well as that of his special care for his people. Harrington 1999, 149; Schwartz 2008, 47, 155, 205.

narrative vocalize their doubts about the intervention for which they ask.[57] The suspense, however, comes not from the changing of God's mood but from whether or not the people who pray have upheld the laws and remained righteous and faithful, that is, whether they still can invoke the help of God. Acts of prayer thus have two major functions within the historical narrative. For one, they invite God to involve himself in battle and, from the perspective of the audience, underline God's participation in history. Secondly, they bespeak the protagonists' trust in God and in themselves as the true beneficiaries to God's promises.

Contesting prayer

In 2 Maccabees, the effects of prayer are signs of divine authority on earth. Consequently, heavenly powers become intertwined with human affairs and politics. The interplay between the exercise of power and the recognition and critique thereof is well attested in the first powerful act of prayer recounted in the book—namely, in the chain of events that concern Heliodorus and the high priest Onias. The aftermath of the intervention of heavenly powers confirms that the focus of the historical narrative is not God's grand plan or his sovereignty, but the character and moral quality of those who trust in God and thus have a share in God's heavenly powers. Indirectly, the text also recognizes attempts to reject the miraculousness of the effects of prayer, perhaps anticipating that those defeated by the act of prayer could make such attempts.

Heliodorus's attempt to rob the treasury of the temple, which was prevented by miraculous intervention (3:13–30; see above), is followed by another, rather remarkable episode that also concerns prayer (3:31–40). The people of the city have hardly expressed their joy and relief, when they realize that Heliodorus is lying on the ground, having only a spark of life left. Heliodorus's companions appeal to the high priest Onias to save his life—crying for help from God (3:31).[58] Onias does not hesitate to offer a sacrifice for the speedy recovery of the man just been beaten up by heavenly appearances sent by the same God to whom now the sacrifice is addressed. This seemingly paradoxical

[57] The appeal of prayer contains an aspect of insecurity (see e.g. 8:28–29; 10:26). Schwartz (2008, 22–23) remarks, however, that one may observe a gradual increase in confidence towards the end of the book. Even so, each episode is a suspenseful trial of trust; what seems to be the increase in confidence over the course of the narrative is perhaps just the confidence characteristic of Judas and his men (8:18) and the coincidental location of their narrative toward the end of the narrative.

[58] This appeal recognizes the authority of the high priest Onias to make an appeal to the Almighty. The Greek expressions are comparable with the typical expressions related to prayer in 2 Maccabees, which imply the recognition of God's authority on earth. For frequently used vocabulary for prayer, see footnote 47.

act is explained by the remark that Onias fears lest "the king might get the notion that some foul play had been perpetrated by the Jews with regard to Heliodorus" (3:32). Before the offering is made, the same two strong young men who had flogged Heliodorus reappear, affirming to Heliodorus that the punishment had really come from God (3:33–34). By the time Heliodorus is able to stand up again, he has decided to become a witness "to all concerning the deeds of the supreme God, which he had seen with his own eyes" (3:36). He departs immediately to the king Seleukos to tell him about his miraculous experience in Jerusalem (3:38–39).

This episode shows that the heavenly appearances were capable not only of wreaking destruction upon the wicked and bringing joy among the righteous, but also of sowing political confusion, as not everyone was able to understand the effects of prayer correctly. In the aftermath of the miracle, the high priest Onias attempts to request another miracle to maintain cordial relations between Jerusalem and the king of Asia. Onias thus appears as a man of responsibility, able to anticipate challenges and turn them to the benefit of the city, its people and the almighty God.[59] Considering this latter act, the earlier heavenly appearances seem somewhat reckless. What was meant as a miraculous rescue was about to lead the people of Jerusalem into ever more dire straits. It was necessary for the young men to return and explain the divine motives behind their actions. It is the high priest Onias, finally, who appears to be in control of the heavenly powers; God's assessments of the situation are, at least, not recounted.

Even Onias's insightful actions, however, do not mark the end of the ramifications of the first divine appearances.[60] The conflict evolves when attention shifts back to the figures from which the whole issue began: the high priest Onias and a certain Simon. After all that had happened, Simon nevertheless "slandered Onias, saying that it was he who had incited Heliodorus and had been the real cause of the misfortune" (4:1). The heavenly appearances had, thus, roused not only concerns about the safety of the city but also debates about their true origin. This resulting conflict begets hatred and even murder among the city's inhabitants (4:3). The people of Jerusalem are divided, forced to side with one of two opposing claims. Some would consider the intervention that halted Heliodorus to be of divine origin (the story that will been told in 2 Maccabees). According to this line of thought, the

[59] The narrator's emphasis here in how non-Jews could and should also recognize the sovereignty of the Almighty God is hardly exceptional in the narrative (cf., e.g., 8:34–36; 9:11–17; 11:13–14). See also Schwartz 2008, 275. According to Doran (2012, 87), such an interest is typical of narratives of divine manifestations in general.
[60] Even though the conclusion of the episode so indicates (cf. 3:40).

people of the city were only indirectly responsible for what had happened: they had asked for the intervention, but the actual implementation was God's own responsibility. Others, however, claimed that Onias himself had committed the acts of violence upon Heliodorus and was therefore responsible.[61] The question of authenticity seems to be central here, as it is the interpretation of the origin and the nature of the events that makes the same figure a pious hero or a slanderer and traitor.[62]

Divine and human factors are intertwined in the miraculous event in a way that breeds ambiguity: even if the appearances are of heavenly origin, they appear in human guise. In addition, their actions seem especially human.[63] This is also the case of Onias's solution to the troubles that ensue. He does not summon the two young men another time, nor does he turn to God for help. He decides, instead, to travel to the court of King Seleucus, "for he saw that without the king's attention public affairs could not again reach a peaceful settlement, and that Simon would not stop his folly" (4:6).[64] In light of the pronounced emphasis on prayer and on the attention of the Almighty to earthly affairs, one might expect the attention of the Almighty to be the key to peace; at this point, however, Onias readily recognizes other authorities on earth, as well as other means of protection of his people.

The stories that follow Heliodorus's attempt to rob the treasury of the temple thus suggest that heavenly authority and the exercise of divine power could be contested and politicised. Although the heavenly appearances and their consequences were visible, their divine authorization remained a matter of belief. Central to each story is Onias's responsible management of the situation: his ability to comprehend the human dynamics at play is presented as a boon to all. That is, the cluster of stories that began with the most extraordinary miracles is concluded with surprisingly earthly diplomatic terms, when Onias finally decides to make an appeal to the king of Asia to intervene.

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[61] As Doran (2012, 88) notes, accusing priests of playing "tricks" was not an uncommon theme in ancient literature, and wonder-workers were typically forced to defend the authenticity of their miracles. The true cause of the miracles performed by Jesus, for instance, is similarly contested in Mark 3:22–27. Cf. Czachesz (p. ppp in this volume), who also notes that the same practices may often be interpreted as magical or non-magical.

[62] There is no doubt about the opinion favoured by the narrator of the text (see 4:1–2), but the existence of two contesting interpretations is nevertheless presented in the book.

[63] Perhaps the clearest case of this ambiguity is found outside the epitomized history, in the second prefixed letter, which reports of cunning priests who lock their king inside the temple and stone him to death from a secret door in the ceiling (1:13–16). Regardless of the participation of human agents, the situation is taken to represent God's judgment on the king as well as on "those who have behaved impiously" (1:17).

[64] The king's authority (πρόνοια in verse 4:6) needs not to be taken as comparable to God's providence. It is interesting, however, that the high priest Onias seems to recognize it as a means to broker peace among the Jews; he could, for example, have prayed God to come and reconcile the disputing factions.

In the end, prayer is one, perhaps, the most frequently used yet not the only available effective means by which the protagonists of 2 Maccabees exercise power. The stories concerning Onias demonstrate the protagonist's ability to negotiate, make allies and establish good relations.[65] Moreover, resorting to prayer requires good situational analysis and a grasp of the situation at hand. Had God been tasked with execution of the aims and aspirations of Jerusalem's inhabitants, they would not have been able to claim that the Almighty should be held responsible for the effects of their prayer. Thus, although the protagonists may resort to divine assistance in their management of earthly matters and do so successfully, the heavenly appearances do not intervene in a way that deprives the protagonists of their agency; in contrast, divine powers seem to be at the service of their pious consumers.

2 Maccabees also attests to the trust of pious Jews in God. The protagonists of the book fight in diverse ways with the support of divine powers. As the act of prayer is repeated to the extent that it becomes as frequent a trope in the historical narrative as battles itself, one of the functions of prayer in 2 Maccabees may be to glorify God and to recognize God as the highest power.[66] Nevertheless, through the act of prayer, the protagonists do not become primarily submissive or passive; they are far from being mere instruments of divine authority.[67] Rather, they are historical actors who surrender themselves to God's care in exchange for the opportunity to express their demands in return. In their prayers, the protagonists express clear political aspirations, choosing examples appropriate to their circumstances to bind God to their wishes and thereby exert direct influence over their own fate.[68]

Conclusion

Among the benefits gained from reading historical narratives is the insight that can be gained into ritual practices and beliefs. It may also supply information about the assumptions and expectations that underlie and motivate ritual behaviour. Sometimes, historical narrative texts attest to the historical efficacy of ritual behaviour. Analyses of such texts may broaden the approach of the historical study of magic, serving as a meaningful addition to analyses of more common sources of magic (e.g., ancient prayer/spells and apotropaic texts). In this article, I have shown that prayer functions as a decisive

[65] Gruen 1998, 9–11; Doran 2012, 13–14. Judas the Maccabee also shows himself as willing to make peace treaties (see 11:15; 12:11–12).
[66] Cf. e.g. 7:37, where the boy to be slain anticipates, as it were, Antiochos's future recognition of God as the sovereign.
[67] Contra Harrington 1999, 138.
[68] This practice is comparable to the ritual and especially apotropaic use of biblical texts, in which a specific narrative or figure is invoked as if to set a precedent; see Korsvol p. ppp in this volume.

factor in the history of the Maccabean Revolt as told in 2 Maccabees. Throughout the book, prayer is described as a ritual act made by pious protagonists, one that can be repeated and can repeatedly produce miraculous effects in favour of those who pray. As such, prayer is one of the themes that provides both structure and meaning to the historical narrative of 2 Maccabees: readers of this book learn not only about the history of the Maccabean Revolt but about the efficacy of prayer by pious, law-abiding Jews. It is therefore vital to consider the work's vision of history alongside an analysis of prayer and its effects in 2 Maccabees to fully grasp how the narrative constantly focalizes and communicates prayer as not only the ideal practice but also an effective one.

The connection between prayer and supernatural intervention, or divine support of a subtler type, is never made explicit in 2 Maccabees, though a causal relationship is strongly implied. Instead of explicit claims, the sequence of events repeatedly confirms the effectiveness of prayer: the book provides abundant affirmative evidence and excludes negative evidence. Prayer is valorised as a driving force behind the success of the protagonists and, thus, is imbued with historically effective power. That is, those who pray to God in times of distress shall be delivered, so long as they remain pure and loyal to God.

This view of prayer has interesting implications concerning God, known in 2 Maccabees as the Almighty. As a form of communication between humans and God, prayer is a form of request and response. In particular, this model limits God's ability to act freely—God either approves or disapproves. When the protagonists are able to persuade God with prayer to side with them or to be involved with them in their enterprises and this act is repeated successfully, God becomes not only an Almighty who participates in history but also a power that is at least partly foreseeable, predictable and thus controllable. Additionally, God is a relatively distant non-personified figure in 2 Maccabees: God is a source of power and authority, seeming to carry out what the protagonists request in prayer on the condition that the protagonists remain pure and faithful and carry out their rituals in God's prescribed manner.

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